

Rebuilding confidence

By Sam Farr

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In the debate over the financial recovery and reinvestment package, there is one question that helps sum up the entire process: "What's broken that needs to be fixed?"

The answer: confidence.

A combination of private greed and an administration that refused to regulate financial markets created a false hope that tough times were behind us. Borrow today, pay back tomorrow became the mantra. A boom in subprime home loans combined with banks that refused to make sure buyers could afford them set the stage for disaster.

Now, the president is left to pick up the pieces, entering office saddled with a knee-buckling economic crisis and two lingering wars. But in this task, he is not alone.

Congress has spent the past couple of months listening to experts from across the political spectrum. The bipartisan consensus has been that the government must be the bank of last resort.

"Spend as much as possible as fast as you can," experts told us again and again. Overspending is better than not spending enough, they insist, and as much money as possible should be directed to blue collar workers who will spend their money on Main Street, not Wall Street. They tell us we must update America's technical and intellectual infrastructure to remain competitive.

So we're putting dollars into local projects, creating local jobs and keeping local companies in business. This bill isn't about banks. It isn't about car companies. It's about putting America

back to work and jump-starting our economy.

So how does the federal government quickly release money under the nation's strict spending laws? The only viable option is to ramp up funding into existing programs controlled by grants and formula disbursements. There is so much that needs to be done and so many aspects of our economy that are hurting. That is why the recovery bill has so many moving parts. It will allow us to put the money where it's needed most, fastest.

I represent almost 700,000 people in three counties, 17 cities and several dozen school districts, and many of us are hurting. Schools are a great example of how this recovery bill will help get us back on our feet. Schools face more and more trouble finding ways to buy, build or borrow. Many are cutting employees. This legislation will direct a lot of money to our schools, including money to modernize facilities and expand the reach of vital programs. Without it, our schools may have to lay off teachers and will surely continue to deteriorate.

The same investment strategy will be used for infrastructure development. Significant amounts of money will be dedicated to building and repairing roads, bridges and rail lines and bringing our electric grid and broadband capacity into the 21st century. Again, we're creating jobs and leaving behind a foundation on which we can build for the future.

Another glaring problem is the foreclosure crisis. In this recovery bill, considerable money will be directed toward bringing stability to the housing market. Keeping people in their homes is important for everyone: families, the economy, lenders and our communities. Empty houses become rundown, lose value and spread the damage.

It is important to note that all of the programs will have oversight mechanisms to make sure we're not wasting our money. During the past eight years, we've seen too many examples of squandered taxpayer dollars. We refuse to continue that cycle of failure.

In the end, we must prop up consumer confidence. We want to be left with a modernized America, able to travel and communicate more efficiently, educate our children more effectively and do all of this in a more environmentally responsible way.

This package is the product of a lot of hard work and is based on the ideas of the best and brightest. I'm voting for this bill because it's our greatest opportunity to get our economy back on track.

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, has represented California's 17th Congressional District for 16 years.